

## THE BIG LAIR TELLS THE TRUTH: EXPOSING TABOOS IN

### AL-GOSAIBI'S THE AMPHIBIAN ABU SHALLAKH

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#### ABSTRACT

*In analogy to the Arabic saying: 'take wisdom from the mouths of the insane', one can say trace truth in the words of liars.*

*This simple study aims at tracing truth in the discourse of the big lair i.e. Abu Shallakh who is the main character in the novel The Amphibian Abu Shallakh by the Saudi novelist and poet Ghazi Al-Gosaibi. It aims, also, at exploring some social issues for the purpose of giving an opportunity to confess some erroneous practices as a step expected to reach correcting them at the end.*

*It hypothesized that some real denied social misdeeds explored smoothly and ironically, by the novelist, on the tongue of his main character Abu Shallakh in order to reach holding the society's attention to such denied practices. The researcher translated and discussed some Arabic references together with some selected evidence from the novel to check the credibility of this hypothesis.*

*After discussing some selected proofs from the novel from the prospect of the study, the paper concludes that Al- Gosaibi, who belongs to a conservative society, managed to explore many hidden truths and taboos, on the tongue of his lair character, Abu Shallakh in one hand meanwhile, implicitly, he submits a reformation invitation to his society in the other hand.*

**KEYWORDS:** Abu Shallakh, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, Big Lair & Saudi Society

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## INTRODUCTION

Ghazi Abdul Rahman Al Gosaibi (Arabic: غازي بن عبد الرحمن القصيبي; 3 March 1940 – 15 August 2010) 'was a Saudi Arabian liberal politician, diplomat, technocrat, poet, and novelist. He was an intellectual and a member of the Al Gosaibi family that is one of the oldest and richest trading families of the Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Al Gosaibi was considered among Saudi Arabia's topmost technocrats since the mid-1970s. The Majalla called him the "Godfather of Renovation". (Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia, 2017)

He is a successful politician and a distinguished novelist and poet. He got his bachelor degree from Egypt, his master from America and his doctorate from Britain. (BBC News, 2010)

His literary works treat subjects like home corruption, solitude, and the relation between Islam, and the west.

Many of his books were banned in Saudi Arabia.

From 1992-2002 he was Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Britain, but he was removed from his post after publishing a poem in praise of a Palestinian female suicide bomber. Back in Saudi Arabia, he became labour minister, a post he held until his death.

As labour minister, he pushed hard for Saudi women to have more job opportunities. He also urged unemployed young Saudi men to take the jobs they had traditionally scorned and left for foreigners, driving his point home by going to serve hamburgers at a fast food restaurant in Jeddah. (*BBC News*, 2010)

Al- Gosaibi published dozens of books, including essays, poetry, and love stories, some of which faced bans in his own country. His best-known novel, *An Apartment Called Freedom* (1996), chronicled the lives of four young Bahrainis leaving their family cocoons and plunging into freewheeling, turbulent 1950s Cairo to attend university. (*The National*, 2010)

In spite of the fact that Al- Gosaibi had a unique experience with management and leadership work because he spent most of his life moving between ministries, he was close to people's issues. However, he preferred to live, by his imagination, away from the people and produced a luxury and velvet class literature. His imagination flew beyond the borders of his homeland that is why most of his stories took place outside his country except *The Amphibian Abu Shallakh* in which he landed on his homeland Al-Hufuf. (Al-Saa'd, 2015)

## OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to detect truth in the comedian novel *The Amphibian Abu Shallakh* by the Saudi poet and novelist Ghazi Al-Gosaibi; and to expose some social hidden taboos on the tongue of Abu Shallakh the main character in the novel whose name means the big lair. It goals, also, to highlight the significance of exposing such taboos in this novel.

## HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of the paper is that Abu Shallakh (the big lair), the main character in the comedian novel *The Amphibian Abu Shallakh* of the Saudi poet and novelist Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, can tell some truths related to some unrecognized negative issues in the Saudi society which can stand for all Arab Gulf societies. Some evidence will be selected from the novel and translated by the researcher to check the credibility of the hypothesis of the study.

## METHODS

The multidisciplinary approach is to be adopted in this study together with the analytical method in order to examine the credibility of the hypothesis of the study.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Though the novel, *The Amphibian Abu Shallakh*, is full of imagination and unbelievable exaggerations, its title, tone, language and most of its characters are remarkably local.

The locality of the novel proved by the name given to the main character i.e. Abu Shallakh. The word, Abu Shallakh, is taken from the typical Arabian Gulf Saudi local dialect. The word is used only in the Arabian Gulf countries including, Saudi Arabia. It is a name given to the person who used to tell exaggerated stories and adventures, mostly, about himself. He is the superhero and the undefeated person who can do what anyone else cannot. The name is a compound word of two parts: *Abu* which means father of and *Shallakh* which means *the lair*. Thus, the name *Abu Shallakh* means

father of lair i.e. the big lair. The amphibian, which means the creature who can live on land or in the sea, is a significant word used to show the superior abilities of Abu Shallakh whose power exceeds the limitations of human nature.

Some critics think that the story does not meet the conditions of a novel since it depends on an interview between a reporter, Abu Lamya, (father of Lamya), who is clearly negative, and Abu Shallakh who is the superhero narrating his adventures, whereas some others think that such criticism for that type of plot is the proof of its success because this proves the skillful way Al-Gosaibi adopted to characterize the narrator or the Arabian storyteller. Abu Shallakh seems to be identified with the character of the Arabian storyteller since he shares the same features of the Arabian Gulf storyteller i.e. 'speech monopolization, lying, irony, tendency to popular culture and using its items' (Al-Mharib, 2001)

A storyteller is a popular person in the Arabian societies before TV invention. He was the only means of entertainment where he used to sit surrounded by people telling his stories which are mixture of truth, imagination, and adventures. The only difference, if any, between the storyteller and Abu Shallakh, is that the traditional storyteller is not the hero of all adventures on the contrary of Abu Shallakh who is mostly the undefeated superhero.

The prospect of this paper is to check whether this big lair Abu Shallakh can tell any truth and detect the purpose of telling these truths on the tongue of the big lair Abu Shallakh.

Reading the novel intensively proves that together with a large number of the unbelievable adventures, it contains a considerable number of uncontroversial facts most of them are attentive to the Saudi society in particular and to the Arabian Gulf Society in general.

Al-Gosaibi launches, in the novel spontaneously and freely through his monologues and dialogues questioning his pivots in order to reveal, on the tongue of his hero, what is going on in his mind. Abu Shlakh goes on to recount his speeches and memoirs starting with the early stage of his life, then the stage of steadfastness, confrontation and Roosevelt's candor, and his empire "Mother of Seven".(the name of Abu Shallakh's foundation)

We travel to his (Abu Shallakh's) exotic journey around the world and discover various aspects of the moon. The axis of the novel, i.e. the narrator whose name is يعقوب المفصّخ ( the unclothed Jacob) and known as the Amphibian Abu Shalakh, is wondering eastward and, westward to the north and south where he met Roosevelt, Eisenhower Mots Tong, revealing the secrets of past events and facts, men and women.

As he walks around, the amphibian Abu Shalakh walks through time, traversing the early stages of man with primitive means of transportation, and reaches the planes, rockets and the Internet at the end.

Through Abu Shallakh, Al-Gosaibi exposes all taboos, political, literary and social ones, because Abu Shallakh has the right to say what others cannot. His characters are symbols and his symbols are not like other symbols, philosophy of life, philosophy of pension, philosophy of reality, and reality in its present philosophy all these pass smoothly through the lines of Al-Gosaibi. Such lines speak with the sarcastic scorn that enriches the depths of the Arab's pain. Al-Gosaibi laughs though slaughtered by pain. (Goodreads, 2017)

The first taboo fact is sociopolitical. It is about hatred of apology under the pretext of losing time. People should invest their time rather than losing it in begging others to forgive them because it opens a door cannot be closed. Abu Shallakh declares that he hates apologies and supports his attitude by giving a political real example: 'Imagine what would happen if our American friends decided to apologize to all those whom they troubled and if they decided to start

apologizing according to the historical hierarchy of the Indians. Then each of Uncle Sam's sons should go to every one of the American Indians, who were exterminated by our American friends, and kiss his/her hands and feet. If such thing happened how can our American friends find time to open McDonald's stores, to connect internet networks and to support Israeli panders?' (Al-Gosaibi, 18)

Al- Gosaibi hits upon one of the social conceptions which are hatred of apology. Abu Shallakh is the typical symbol for Saudis who do not like to confess their mistakes or apologize for them. Al-Gosiabi justifies such attitude on the tongue of Abu Shallakh, meanwhile, he is badly mocking such behavior. Such squib evokes readers to laugh as they receive the novelist's message.

The second taboo laughed at in the novel is the comedian narration for the maltreatment of servants. The first example given is the Philippine babysitter, Imelda, who is given a very unjust work program pretending that it is a comfortable daily program consistent with the resolutions of the International Labor Organization concerning the human treatment of workers. The program starts at 4 AM: From 4 to 7AM she cleans the corral and milk the cows; from 7 to 8 AM she prepares the milk for Abu Shallakh and amuses him while having it; from 8 to 10 AM she prepares food for the adults and serves them while having it; from 10 to 11AM she washes dirty clothes with her hands; from 11 AM to midday she prepares him his lunch and amuses him while having it; from midday to 2 PM she prepares lunch for adults, serves them while having it and then she washes the dishes by licking them; from 2 to 4 PM she goes back to the corral and milks the cows; from 4 to 6 PM she starts the physical education when she starts running and Abu Shallakh follows her and hits her with his mambo stick; form 6 to 8 PM she washes dirty clothes; form 8 to 10 PM she enjoys the adult people of the family by sexual caresses and massage; from 10 PM to midnight she washes the cows with water, soap and perfume; from midnight to 2 AM she irons cloths ... When Abu Shallakh does not finish the duties of that poor babysitter servant, Abu Lamya interrupts: ' what is this? Is this a program?', Abu Shallakh replies you are right. It is a very comfortable program and leaves her leisure..' and goes on describing how this leisure spoils her and finally she commits a suicide by drinking all the milk of a cow which explodes her intestines and dies! (Al-Gosaibi, 26-27) Al-Gosaibi sarcastically describes her end and her suicide as a result of dyspepsia not by hunger.

After her death, Abu Shallakh suffers a psychological depression because he is unable of practicing his mambo hobby. His family brought him an African young slave at the age of five in order to let Abu Shallakh practice his hobby. They give the slave another program in line with the International Announcement of Human Rights!!!: from 6 to 10 AM the young slave cleans the corral and milks the cows; from 8 to midday he does the first physical education exercises, running in front of Abu Shallakh who follows him, hitting him with his mambo stick; from midday to 3 PM the child slave goes to collect wood from valleys and deserts and brings it on his head! From 3 to 8 PM he cleans the house, the urinal and the sink; from 8 to 10 PM he practices the second physical education by being slapped by the adults of the family in order to stimulate his blood circulation and increase endurance; Form 10 to midnight he washes the laundry; from midnight'. Then Tawfeeq, the interviewer Abu Lamya, wondered 'is this a program?!!', Abu shallakh replies 'you are right, you are right'. And told Abu Lamya that the program is so comfortable that it spoils the slave and allows space for some unhealthy hallucination leads the slave to commit a suicide by eating the scorpions, that are used to live in the corral !. (Al-Gosaibi, 27-28)

The question is whether these incidents are suicides committed by both the Philippine nursemaid and the African child slave or murders committed mercilessly by a violent family? It seems as if both die out of suffering and hunger.

They are simply and coldly murdered by those inhuman people through the inhuman violent program they should undergo.

Al-Gosaibi goes on drawing the picture of maltreatment that remarkable in the Arabian gulf societies. The exact mockery that arouses the readers' abhorrence is the depression, Abu Shallakh suffers from after each incident. As if Al-Gosaibi wants to tell that though those inhuman groups of people prove to be senseless, they pretend to be delicate and emotional.

Not only does the novelist treat maltreatment of servants, he treats the maltreatment of animals too. The adults in the family decide that the best cure for Abu Shallakh's depression this time is to bring him pets. First, they bring him a small lamb, and he starts sharing his milk with him, but he discovers that the lamb cries each time he hits him with the stick. Abu Shallakh enjoys that and goes on a new game, i.e. each suck of milk should be a reward for a previous hit. Unfortunately, the lamb starts to be accustomed to beating and bears it silently which annoys Abu Shallakh who inserts a nail in the right eye of the lamb and gets it out, because for him 'lamb does not need two eyes, one enough', and each one starts to call him one-eyed. This is fantastic for Abu Shallakh whose behavior causes naming the nameless lamb! He likes getting eyes out and decides after deep thinking to get out the lamb's left eye, causing the lamb to have another name i.e. the blind. Finally, for a reason Abu shallakh ignores, the adults decide to butcher the blind lamb. ((Al-Gosaibi, 29)

The adults now decide to bring him some doves to which he used to spread seeds and when they fly down to eat he hits them but unfortunately, they mostly fly. Then he decides to discover his scientific tendencies by anatomizing the doves' bodies using the kitchen knife. As a result of that, his family decides to butcher all doves and eats them. (Al-Gosaibi, 29-30)

This time his family decides to bring him a burro with whom Abu Shallakh spends an amazing time. Whenever he hits the burro, it brays giggling, but the violent nature of the child, Abu Shallakh, cannot get enough. One day he notices that the flies annoy his new friend, the burro, so he decides to scissor the burro's tail in order to relieve him but the burro runs away forever. (Al-Gosaibi, 30)

Since Abu Shallakh is a social child who cannot stay alone, he finds himself a new friend which is a cat this time. He spends nice time with the cat and to increase his joy he ties the cat's neck with a rope and gets her down in the well to teach her swimming but when he gets her out he finds her already dead! (Al-Gosaibi, 30-31)

One of the taboos that are highlighted in the novel is bribery. When Abu Shallakh goes for an education, he manages to give bribes to his female teacher to get rid of her physical punishment. Accordingly, she gives him her own authorities which he misuses. His over physical punishment leaves marks on his classmates' bodies for which their parents complain to the education office. When the inspector arrives, Abu Shallakh was the first one who met. He is praised him in some lines of verse and gave him a bowl full of various kinds of delicious food. The inspector, then, feels that there was no need to visit the school and wrote his report against the female tutor whose behavior, due to the inspector, resulted by her sadist tendencies that are mixed with Alzheimer's disease. (Al- Gosaibi, 46-48)

Out of his severe dissatisfaction with his Arabian society, Al-Gosaibi goes on considering the conditions of Arabs mocking their stupidity which resulted in losing their properties by leaving it to others to use. To ease his criticism, Al-Gosaibi shifts to his comedian character, Abu Shallakh, who justifies this misbehavior committed by Arabs. For Abu Shallakh, it is only because of mad cow disease that infects Arabs who used to eat the spoiled meat of cow!

The cows used to eat scorpions, cockroaches, dead chickens and lizards that cause them to madness. Later on, this

madness transferred to people who used to eat meat. The symptoms of the disease shown in the hysterical rabid selling off all their properties, orchards and lands at cheap prices so that they find themselves bankrupted at the end. (Al-Gosaibi, 55-56)

One of the interesting issues Al-Gosaibi treats in his novel is mirroring the treatment of Indians to the Badu, the mobile tribes in the deserts, at the beginning of the oil boom. They taught them how to work and seem to have a high position upon Badu on the opposite of what is going on now.

When Abu Shallakh fed up with his mad people, he decides to depend on himself and find a job with the petrol company. In the oil company, he meets Banker, the Indian manager, who instructs Abu Shallakh and his other friends, who come for the same purpose. In weak broken Arabic, Banker tells them that the company needed to train them for the purpose of development and getting much oil which is necessary for Badu and for Americans as well. Then they 'will be very rich and Americans will be richer'...understood? Banker said. In one voice they replied 'understood boss'. (Al-Gosaibi, 59-60). Banker instructs them to go to a training center so as to have six-month training in English, calculation, petrol, and discipline. When they ask about the meaning of discipline he tells them that it means that junior employer should obey senior one. They spent their night in a tiny booth on the ground whereas their American masters and trainers used to stay in a specific camp where all services available (Al-Gosaibi, 59-60)

As if Al-Gosaibi wants to send a message to his society in order to reconsider their conception to others especially Indians who were their masters one day: 'Indians precedes Arabs in progress for light years; it is enough to have atomic bombs; it is enough to have fold of what America has of engineers; it is enough to have successful democracy in spite of having thousand languages, thousand religions and thousand tribes; it is enough to be able to satisfy half of the world's need of computer technicians for the coming ten years. Even the Indian chef has doctoral degree in parapsychology (Al-Gosaibi, 63-64)

Racism is one of the deep rooted social cons not only at the national level but at the global level as well. What makes it worse in the Arab societies is being against the Islamic instructions which Arabs supposed to have great faith in. Such ugly conception exposed by Al-Gosaibi in a light way while narrating the love stories of Abu Shallakh who lost his love many times and his heart broken simply because of being either inferior or superior to the one he chooses to marry.

When he saw a girl whose name is Wadhha and decides to engage her, the first question her father asks is: (('To which tribe do you belong, son?')). (Al-Gosaibi, 68) Abu Shallakh told him that his family known now as 'Al-Mufassakh' family (the unclothed) which was in the past named 'Lbysan' family (the clothed ) (68) the father said: 'I have never heard of you. Name your ancestors. Abu Shallakh said: 'I am Yaa'qob' (Jacob) 'son of Mhaisin, son of Khdhair'. (68) the father surprised and 'said, with disgust he did not try even to hide, "oh, Allah choose for me. Khdhairi and come to engage my daughter?! Stand up, stand. You are not equal to us." (Al-Gosaibi, 68)

Later on, Abu Shallakh loves another girl whose name is Sabha but, ironically, when he engaged her, her father rejected him because she is inferior to Abu Shallakh i.e. Sabha is not equal to him this time!! As a result of such racism, Abu Shallakh decides to shut of marriage, enjoy his life and satisfy his needs out of the legal marriage relationship. Temporary marriage is one of many ways to do so. Such behaviors violate the principles of the conservative Arab Saudi society.

Abu Shallakh's realization of globalization needs to be considered here. He looks at the matter from the economic

point of view. He thinks: 'With the spread of globalization, power and wealth will be concentrated in 15% of the human race. The international community will be like the president community who has 2%. Every industry you see now in the Third World will bust; every grocery will close and every bank will collapse. It is the economics of the big project where the big fish swallow the small ones and the big project eats up the small one.' (Al-Gosaibi, 253)

Al- Gosaibi hits upon some other abhorred issues like fake certificates that are obtained just for the sake of prestige and hierarchy especially Ph.D. which should entitle the names of both the rich and the statesmen. He laughs highly at them when he lets Abu Shallakh, whose knowledge is mere fake, to get Ph. D. degree.

Another example of the abhorred issues exposed in the novel is goggling and how swindlers can compile a large amount of money for nothing but telling lies. He did so by letting Abu Shallakh open a spiting clinic for quick recovery!

## CONCLUSIONS

The novel seems to serve as a mirror reflecting the exact picture of Al-Gosaibi's society which is, as any other society, not free of cons.

Hatred of apology, Maltreatment to servants or modern slavery, bribery, racism, globalization, fake certification, goggling are all among the cons of the Arabian gulf societies which Al-Gosibi mocks and hits upon in his novel *The Amphibian Abu Shallakh*. The novel tends to be an invitation to the enlightened ones in the Arabian Gulf society so they can put their hands on the pain that needs to be reconsidered, treated or even uprooted.

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